

S E C R E T

15 March 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Far East Division

SUBJECT : Status and Treatment of Prisoners of War
in Laos

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This report was obtained in conversations with [redacted]
[redacted] on 14 March 1973. This information was
extracted from DIA POW files with exception of the note
following paragraph A.

A. Status

DRV provided list of 10 U.S. POWs in Laos 1 February
1973:

Four had been reported by returnees as being seen
in Hanoi Hilton (Ha Lo Prison) during February 1971:

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[redacted]
Walter M. Stischer, Major, USAF
Stephen G. Long, 1st Lt., USAF
Henry J. Bedinger, Lt. (jg) USN

One has been reported as being in Laos as of recent
date:

Samuel A. Mattix, civilian

Until the list was released on 1 February, there was
some doubt about the status of the others:

DIA review(s) completed.

Edward W. Leonard, Captain, was carried by USAF
as missing
Norbert A. Gotner, Major, USAF, was carried as
missing

DPMO review(s) completed.

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Jack M. Butcher, 1st Lt., USAF, was felt to be a POW but was carried by USAF as missing
Lloyd D. Oppel, Canadian civilian, was carried as POW
Charles F. Riess, Captain, USAF, was downed in December 1972 and carried as missing

As of 30 December 1972 DIA carried a total of ten persons as POW in Laos, including 2 Navy, 6 USAF and 2 Civilians. DIA lists 359 MIA in Laos not accounted for by the North Vietnamese or Pathet Lao to date.

[redacted] has been carried as POW for many years but was not on the releasee list. Since the return and debriefing of escapee Dengler, it has been felt that [redacted] chances of survival were slim.

NOTE: During the course of its representations to the Lao Patriotic Front representative in Vientiane concerning the POW question, the American Embassy received the impression that the Lao Communists may be holding American prisoners in addition to those revealed by Hanoi but the Front has refused to provide any specific information on additional prisoners beyond implying that information may be forthcoming during negotiations between the Front and the Lao government when the overall question of all prisoners in Laos is to be discussed. A date has not been set for these discussions because the Front wants to settle political and other military questions before negotiating on the prisoner issue as such.

B. Treatment

Although we do not have very much definitive information on treatment of American POWs in Laos, we do have the debriefings of Dieter Dengler and Charles F. Klusman, Navy pilots who were captured and escaped.

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Their reports indicate that the conditions of captivity, techniques of interrogation and pressures of indoctrination were quite similiar to those practiced by the Vietnamese Communists. Physical conditions in North Vietnam in the regular prisons were at times quite tolerable, and probably better than conditions in Laos. Near the Pathet Lao capital, however, there were prisons dug back into the karst limestone cliffs and these may have been fairly tolerable.

As would be expected, treatment varied from time to time, depending on what the captors were trying to get from the prisoner. At times treatment was brutal, physical and psychological pressures being used to break the prisoners' will and ability to resist.

25X1 [redacted] was captured in Luang Prabang, moved across Laos to Dien Bien Phu where he was held in a fairly small cage for two years, and then taken with his radio operator to Hanoi. He survived. These rough indicators are about all that we can say on treatment in Laos.

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